

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector 9-14

Luke, Chapter 8, Verses

(9) He then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. (10) "Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. (12) I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income. (13) But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner. (14) I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Personal Reflection of John Puhak

St. Luke starts this gospel passage in a rather unique way. He explains its meaning before we actually read it: "He (Jesus) addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else." So, we know this will be a story about human pride and how it can lead to contempt for others.

St. Luke tells us that there were two people who went to the temple area to pray, a Pharisee and a tax collector. By their nature, these two people are completely different. The Pharisee was a member of an ancient Jewish sect distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law. The tax collector is seen as a traitor to his own people. He takes money from them, adds an exorbitant fee for his services, and provides the tax revenue to the Roman oppressors.

The Pharisee takes up his position, which is a position of honor at the front of the temple. The Pharisee spoke a "prayer" to himself where his pride is blinding him. His prayer is a list of self-accolades and accomplishments. He thanks God that he's not like the rest of humanity, to include the tax collector. He's in the Temple to glorify himself versus to ask for God's mercy.

We are told that the "tax collector stood off at a distance." Even though he was truly an outcast among his people he went to the temple anyway. Before we hear his prayer, we can tell by his body language what he was thinking: "[He] would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast." Here is a man convinced of his need of God's mercy. He says: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." The actual Greek translation is: God have mercy on me **the** sinner.

Jesus tells us the tax collector went home "justified" (his sins were forgiven), but not the Pharisee. Why is this? Jesus explains: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." The tax collector humbly asked for God's mercy and he received it; the Pharisee didn't think he needed God's mercy, so he didn't bother to ask.

As we read this parable, it's very easy for us to question the Pharisee's prayer and his contempt. Who does he think he is! We thank God that we're not like him. In reality, we can transform into the Pharisee. Lord Jesus forgive us and have mercy on us for the times that we have been judgmental and treated people with contempt.